Coaching Styles: Male vs. Female Athletes

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ABSTRACT: After conducting extensive research, I have found similar and different views regarding coaching styles and their effects on male and female athletes. Although there were many different thoughts, all people can agree that male and female athletes are very different emotionally, physically, and mentally.

KEYWORDS: *coaching, sports, discourse, athletes, male, female*

Coaching Styles: Male vs. Female Athletes

One debate occurring in the sports industry right now is the effects of different coaching styles on athletes. As everyone knows, male and female athletes are very different. These differences are shown physically, emotionally, and mentally during their sport, and daily life. With these differences, you need to approach the athlete in different ways, to allow them to reach their potential. This brings up the debate about coaching styles, and what will benefit the athlete in the long run for their well being, while also achieving a winning record. There are many different opinions on this topic. Some people believe that men should be banned from coaching women's sports; while others believe that having male coaches are the best thing for female athletes. With these differing beliefs, there is plenty of controversy, but everyone can agree on one thing: male and female athletes are different, and this should be taken into account. The major factor to an athlete's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing is directly correlated to their coaching staff.

Discourse communities in general are the relation between like groups of people. In this case, the discourse communities would be sports communities. Discourse communities have their own language, basic values, and assumptions. In general, people in these groups have a same common goal. For example, people on the same sports team all want to win games, causing them to work together to reach the common goal. In sports communities, some shared language that is used is yelling from the sidelines, jargon from your sport, and profanity at times. One example of assumptions in sports communities is when your coach is upset and yells *get on the end line.* To a person not in the sports community, this would not be a big deal, however, all athletes know that this is going to be forty-five minutes of suicide runs, or until your coach is satisfied with the amount of puke on the turf. Discourse communities, especially sports communities, have very special language, shared goals, and assumptions.

Along with the coaching staff, the athletes also play a large part on the sports community as a whole. Athletes in general are a very different species than the regular person. Athletes are determined, hard-working, self motivated, competitive, and most of all passionate. Having a large group of these people only gives way to a very high-energy atmosphere. With all of this energy and competition, athletes push themselves and their peers to always be better. With this, everyone has the same goal in their sport- to be the best. To be the best, there must be tough love from peers and coaches to push the athletes. This tough love entails whistles, yelling, and aggressive tones. This discourse community is very tight knit group of people who have the same interests and drive to succeed in their sports.

Here at Central Michigan, we have a very strong sports discourse community. All the athletes are somehow connected either through functions, workouts, or mutual friends. Since all the athletes have overlapping practice or lifting times, we all become very close. This also goes for outside of the Indoor Athletic Complex. While walking to and from class, you can always find a familiar face to talk with. Another example is the mandatory study tables that athletes must complete. These tables cause all athletes to hang out and study together for up to ten hours a week. This causes all the athletes to get very close with each other. There are pros and cons to this. One of the cons is that word travels very fast due to how much we all interact with the different sports. The pros of spending so much quality time with other athletes are that you make lifelong friends- and always have spectators at your games. While being an athlete here at CMU, I have witnessed first hand a very strong discourse community. This discourse community has shown me how close a group can get due to shared interests and goals.

Although the athletes are very close, how close the athletes get with their coaches is determined by their coaching style. In the sports community, there are three different coaching styles. These different coaching styles will reveal how the coach will act in stressful situations. The first coaching style is autocratic. These are the very bossy or “hard ass” coaches. If they see you goofing off at practice, they will stop what they’re doing, yell at you, and make the whole team run sprints for an hour. The next coaching style is democratic. These coaches are the perfect balance of work and play. They are to guide you while helping you grow as a player, and develop you into a better person as well. If they saw you goofing off at practice, they would come over and give you a stern talking to you, give you a warning, and get on with practice. The last coaching style is laissez-faire. These are the coaches that don’t care about anything, and are there to have fun. If they saw you goofing off, they would join in and cancel practice early. With these different coaching styles, there are different opinions on which is the best, and which should be used in female athletics.

With having male and female athletes interacting so much, there is a lot of talk about the different coaching styles that are integrated into their own daily lives. A lot of the football players here at CMU talk about how their coaches take a very tough love perspective towards the team. As a whole, they are treated as professional athletes and not necessarily looked at as a student. However, in other teams- especially women’s teams here- they are treated as a whole person rather than just an athlete. Their coaches care about their well-being, but also want them to be successful on the field as well. In my experience, our coaching staff is a mix of these two. We are treated as athletes first and foremost, but if necessary, we are treated and cared for as an individual rather than just a player. These are a few examples of different coaching styles that are used in Division 1 athletics. The coaching styles tend to differ based off of sport and gender, this giving very different coaching morals.

With this, many people have strong opinions on whether or not men should be able to coach female sports. One article believes that since there are seldom women coaching male Division 1 sports, there is no place for men to be coaching Division 1 women's teams. This gender bias is one of the main reasons why it is necessary to ban male coaches from women’s athletics. Another article explains another reason with more evidence. They believe that men should not be able to coach women is due to their lack of empathy for the players. This lack of empathy translates to the fact that they would not be able to handle the emotional aspect of coaching a women’s sports team. This lack of empathy is due to the chemical in the brain, testosterone. This hormone does not allow for males to show as much emotion as women, causing male coaches to come off as “cold”. The article also goes on to talk about how women need to be evaluated as a person rather than just an athlete, and emotion along with the mental aspect must be factored into the coaching to create a successful team. Some people believe that males are not cut out to be women’s head coaches due to their lack of empathy, and gender biases.

Others have complete opposite opinions on this debate. Many people believe that men are very important pieces in creating a winning team, on and off the field. This article says that men are so successful at creating a championship team due to the fact that women respect them more. Some women feel as though taking orders from another woman is demeaning and will not give as much respect to a female coach. The article also states that some women feel uneasy at the fact that they could possibly have a lesbian as a coach. Being an athlete with a lesbian coach, I feel as though it does not, and should not, affect your experience playing a sport. Having a lesbian coach, my teammates and I have never felt vulnerable or uncomfortable due to her homosexuality. With many opposing views, some people believe that women feel threatened by a higher up female role coaching.

One thing that everyone can agree on is physical differences between male and female athletes. Not only is this difference coming from sexual organs, but also how the bodies are chemically, and muscularly created. The chemical differences come into play mainly in respect to endurance and cardiovascular fitness. Both of these categories describe the relation to glycogen, and oxygen consumption and conversion and how they play a role into the athletes themselves. For example, the article states that women's bodies are more efficient at converting glycogen -which is a secondary source of fuel- to energy. Due to this efficient chemical change, this allows women to have a higher endurance level, and be able to outrun men for a longer period of time. There are also major differences in the physical and muscular components of men and women. One example states that men have larger, and longer bones, which provide a larger frame for more muscles, while also giving males a larger center of gravity. Male athletes also have much tighter ligaments, allowing injuries to be less common than females. One article states that women have such a higher rate of injury in joints such as knees and shoulders due to the lack of supporting tissues around them, including their less elastic ligaments. The mechanics of the female body also play a large role in injuries. One of the major injuries that happen to female athletes are ACL tears. This injury is largely due to the fact that we have wider hips, and the angle that it meets the knee makes it very susceptible for tears. Regardless of the different views people have of male and female athletes, the one thing everyone can agree on is that we are physically different, and should not be compared to one another.

Athletes are a rare breed with a very different view on life and success. With this, athletes need a very different way of being coached. The altered way of coaching differs with every player regardless of gender, age, or sport. To be a successful coach you need to have a balance, and finding that balance for every player is the key to success. Some athletes, especially women, would rather have the coaching based off of them as a whole rather than males who would rather have a tough love approach to reach their success. Regardless of the different coaching styles, and which is preferred, everyone can agree on the fact that male and female athletes differ emotionally, physically, and mentally and should not be compared to each other. With these differences, male and female athletes must have coaching styles that can benefit them as a person, and as an athlete to help them reach the success they are striving to achieve.